

BAOS & BAOMS – PPE Guidance and the New SARS-CoV-2 variant**Paul Coulthard - BAOS President, Peter Brennan - BAOMS Chair (27 January 2021)**

This update reinforces our message of 4 January now that we have confirmation of our earlier concern that the UK new SARS-CoV-2 variant association with increased mortality.

The new variant coronavirus (Covid-19)

Data from Whole Genome Sequencing, epidemiology and modelling suggest the new variant 'VUI – 202012/01' (the first Variant Under Investigation in December 2020) transmits up to 70% more readily than other strains and may be more lethal with a mortality risk around 30% higher than other variants. The mortality-risk evidence comes from the UK government's New and Emerging Respiratory Virus Threats Advisory Group (NERVTAG) and is based on four separate studies carried out on the same dataset.

OS/OMFS role

Oral and Oral and Maxillofacial Surgeons and their teams have a critical role in helping to prevent virus transmission as the new variant spreads rapidly through the UK. Our first joint statement was published on 20 March 2020 when we advised on the use of appropriate PPE, including the wearing of a FFP3 respirator for all patients in close contact even when the patient was asymptomatic. Much has changed since then. Our PPE availability is not the issue it was and we have testing and a vaccination programme that was barely imaginable.

PPE

The way to control this virus remains the same, whatever the variant. We wish to emphasise that Oral and Oral and Maxillofacial Surgeons and their teams should follow current recommendations for Infection prevention and Control and maintain appropriate PPE strict guidance as the likelihood of the patients being COVID-19 positive becomes higher. Redeployment of staff is already underway in London and the South East of England. Undergraduate dental and medical students have been called to volunteer to work on critical care or wards as support staff with duties including being part of a proning team. We wish to re-iterate our previous advice regarding caution especially for those who have not yet been vaccinated. As per government advice, when not treating patients, it is also essential to maintain social distancing and continue to wash hands regularly to minimise the risk of viral transmission.

Various factors can affect overall clinical outcomes in COVID-19, including ethnicity, age, sex, pre-existing comorbidities, *plus the increasing stress on NHS teams.*

More information: BAOMS www.baoms.org.uk and BAOS www.baos.org.uk